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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

Monday, January 20, 1941

Subject: "USING FROZEN FRUITS AND VEGETABLES." Information from the Office of Experiment Stations, U. S. D. A.

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You may have learned to cook when you were knee high to a grasshopper. You may have been cooking 20 or 40 years. You may be experienced and scientific in cooking. Yet you always have to be ready to learn more about cooking, because you never know when a new food is going to appear, or an old food put up in some new way that calls for new cooking rules.

In the last few years frozen foods have brought up new cooking problems. At first even the food scientists weren't sure of the best way to prepare frozen vegetables and fruits for the table. The markets were offering frozen peas, green beans, and a score of other delicious-looking frozen vegetables to say nothing of frozen berries, cherries, peaches and other fruit. Farm families were taking their own garden products to freeze in locker plants. And housewives everywhere were asking how to make the most of these good frozen foods. They couldn't find the answer in their old reliable cookbooks.

So food scientists at many State experiment stations went to work to find the best ways of preparing frozen foods. And now printed directions have been published by State scientists in Illinois, New York, Michigan, Washington, and Tennessee, among others.

One point all these scientists emphasize is that the care of frozen food after it comes out of the freezer cabinet or locker is just as important as the cooking, and sometimes more so.

The finest frozen peas or the most delicious green beans may lose their freshness as well as their vitamin C--may even come close to spoiling unless you give them proper care from the moment they come out of freezing until they go in the kettle, and unless you use them promptly. Canned or stored vegetables can stand and wait, but not frozen vegetables. Frozen vegetables are perishable. A Washington State scientist makes the suggestion that you treat frozen food much as you do ice cream. And New York State scientists say you can keep frozen vegetables a few days in the freezing tray of an electric refrigerator, but they say never to keep them over 24 hours in an ice refrigerator.

Illinois scientists advise wrapping packages of frozen food in layers of paper to insulate them against heat on the way home, and getting the food home as fast as possible.

So much for the care of frozen food. Now about cooking. Cook frozen vegetables very much as you do fresh vegetables, but in about half the time. Since thawing destroys vitamin C in the vegetables, put them on to cook while they are still frozen. (The only exception to this rule is corn on the cob, which should thaw before cooking. Otherwise the frozen cob will chill the kernels of corn.)

If you are boiling frozen vegetables, use only enough salted water to cover them, and have a tight-fitting cover on the pan to keep the water from boiling away. Have the salted water boiling hard when the frozen vegetables go in. The Illinois scientists suggest that as the solid mass thaws a little, you take a fork and break it into smaller pieces so the hot water will reach all parts quickly. When the vegetable is completely thawed and the water starts boiling again, look at the clock and start timing.

Timing is important because frozen vegetables overcook so easily. And overcooking makes them soft, mushy and poor in flavor. In general, frozen vege-

tables need just a few minutes of boiling. Cooking time, according to Illinois scientists, is 2 to 4 minutes for frozen asparagus, cut-corn, and spinach; 5 minutes for peas; and 8 to 15 minutes for beans, depending on the kind of bean. A pint of lima beans, or three-fourths of a pound, needs 12 to 15 minutes of boiling. A pint of snap beans needs only 8 to 10 minutes, and soy beans 10 minutes. When the vegetable is tender, take it off the stove, add butter or other seasoning, and serve. To save vitamins and minerals as well as flavor, try to regulate the heat under the pan so most of the water is used up during the cooking, and you don't have to drain it off.

Now about frozen fruit. Fruit is not so much a cooking problem as a thawing problem. You can cook frozen fruit just as you would fresh fruit, and use it in any dessert or in preserves, jams and so on. But frozen fruit without cooking needs to be thawed carefully. The Michigan Station advises serving fruit just before it is completely thawed, so it will be very cold but not hard. If fruit stands long after thawing, it becomes mushy and unattractive. The New York Station reports that slow thawing gives better results than quick thawing. Fruit is most delicious if you set the package in the refrigerator, and let it gradually thaw during the night. You see, if you let the fruit thaw in a warm place, the outside may get soft and mushy while the inside is still hard-frozen. Fruit frozen without sweetening is extra good thawed in sirup.

New York scientists find that a pound package of fruit takes 6 hours to thaw in the ordinary refrigerator; 3 hours to thaw out on the kitchen table; and 2 hours to thaw in a breeze or under an electric fan. Frozen fruit in a waterproof container you can thaw in 45 minutes if you stand it in cold water.

Briefly now, the important points about using frozen foods are these: Use them as soon as possible after they come out of freezing, and keep them as cold as possible until you use them. Put vegetables on to cook while still frozen, and cook in very little water just a few minutes. Use frozen fruit in cooking like fresh fruit. Frozen fruit served uncooked is best thawed slowly in the refrigerator.

